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## INTERNATIONAL

## Salvador Rebels Unite; Woes Remain

## FOREIGN

## INSIGHT

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For years, everywhere from union halls to guerrilla camps, El Salvador's rebels have summed up their hopes in a single slogan: "The people united will never be defeated." But they've rarely practiced the unity they preach.

The five guerrilla armies that make up the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, or FMLN, announced last week that they intend to unite into one army. Had they combined forces six years ago, the war in El Salvador, despite the nearly \$2 billion the U.S. has poured into the country since 1979, might have gone very differently.

Instead, the history of the Salvadoran left has been one of ugly family feuds, fought over everything from tactics to arcane interpretations of Marxist philosophy.

In 1979 and 1980, the rebels had the momentum against a series of unpopular juntas, but lacked the coordination and weapons to deliver a knockout blow. Today, the government has the momentum, following a series of elections, policy changes, and a significant improvement in its army's capability.

## Too Little Too Late

Robert Leiken, an analyst of the Salvadoran left at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, says, "The FMLN is feeling rather hard-pressed and that's the reason they are uniting militarily." He adds, however, "It's probably too little too late."

Still, Salvadoran leftists are enthusiastic about the unity announcement broadcast over Radio Venceremos. Hector Oqueli, a top rebel diplomat, says a united army "could easily facilitate actions that were impossible before there was coordination."

"This is a great moment of joy for us," says an FMLN activist, who asked to go unnamed. He adds that the "plan to merge forces" will rationalize logistics and commands, and make the distribution of supplies and armaments more efficient.

But he also points out that the announcement was a statement of intent. "It may take a year, maybe five years, maybe even 10 years, to integrate the armies," he says. "This is a process."

Salvadoran Marxists speak of the "process" because their revolution is already decades old. All five guerrilla groups

sprouted from the Salvadoran Communist Party; yet despite the fact the groups are cousins, they aren't the kissing kind.

Roque Dalton, a talented young poet, was executed in 1975 by his own guerrilla group, the People's Revolutionary Army, or ERP, on the improbable charge that he was an agent for the Central Intelligence Agency and for Cuba. He had earned the wrath of his comrades by criticizing the group, one of the two largest of the FMLN, for being overly militaristic.

His execution prompted several ERP activists to break away and form the Armed Forces of National Resistance, or FARN, still the most moderate of the five armies.

The groups grew independently and were further splintered by the 1979 young army officers' coup. Some of them—including the Moscow-line Communist Party—joined the junta while others shunned a political settlement. Then, that junta collapsed and the civil war exploded with the rebels poorly prepared to fight it.

Fidel Castro knocked heads at a 1980 Havana meeting, warning the guerrilla leaders that if they didn't unite, they couldn't expect help from Cuba. They listened, and the FMLN, an umbrella group, was born.

## Poor Coordination

But each army retained its own high command and still does. Lack of coordination always has made the left its own worst enemy. During a 1981 offensive, poor planning resulted in guerrillas of the Popular

Liberation Forces, of FPL, and of the FARN shooting at each other by mistake during their attack on the city of Santa Ana.

Rebels occupying the strategic Guazapa volcano privately complained in 1982 that guerrillas of the FPL, the most radical and independent group, wouldn't protect their comrades' flanks during enemy sweeps.

True unification—or steps toward that goal—became a possibility only in 1983 when the FPL leadership ruptured. Melida Anaya Montes, the number two comandante of the group and a proponent of rebel unity, was knifed to death in Managua, Nicaragua, by FPL hard-line followers of the number one comandante, Salvador Cayetano Carpio.

The FMLN at first blamed the CIA for the murder but after Nicaraguan police discovered the true nature of the slaying, Cayetano Carpio, a single-minded fanatic, committed suicide.

His death was good for the FMLN, although the FPL is still smarting from the bloodletting. And the ERP, as recently as this spring, has followed tactics—from forced recruitment to kidnapping elected mayors—that aren't supported by some of the other groups. The FMLN now says such divergences of military policy won't be allowed any longer. That's been said before.

It's doubtful this history of division is completely reversible, even though unity is essential if the FMLN is to survive as more than a nuisance to the government.